

## **Afghan Engineer District Partners with TF Hammer Engineer Officers for OPD**

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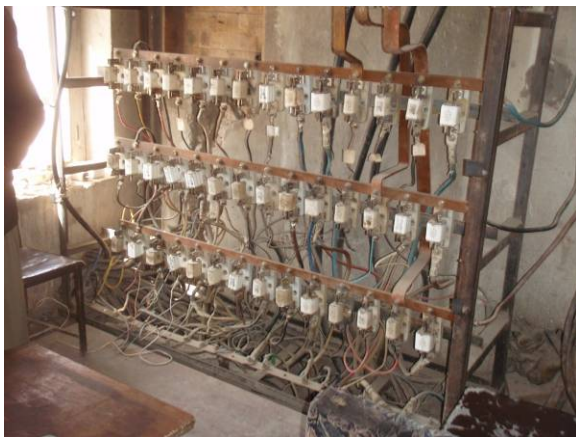
The Afghan Engineer District (AED) of the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has partnered with Task Force Hammer, 62<sup>nd</sup> Engineer Combat Battalion (Heavy) to implement an officer professional development (OPD) program that aims to exhibit broad scale project management and to retain quality company-grade Engineer officers by offering perspective on future Army opportunities. From February through April, two-person Engineer officer teams rotate through Kabul, staying at the Qalaa House Compound for three to five days where we enjoy the welcoming atmosphere and life support amenities while learning the workings of an Engineer District. We get to meet both the military and civilian staff and learn of their various roles, visit projects in the Kabul area, attend meetings between Project Managers and contractors, and shadow the District Engineer Commander. The desired effects are for each Engineer officer to gain a better appreciation for project management and awareness of opportunities within the highly diverse Engineer Regiment. Additional benefit comes from professional interaction between Professional Engineers.



AED Headquarters, Qalaa House Compound, Kabul

Our trip with AED included of two days of project site visits and one day of shadowing the Commander, COL Thomas O'Donovan. During our in-brief, we learned that the AED mission is to conduct project management, construction and engineering in the Central Asian Republics to facilitate the establishment of a secure and stable environment while promoting reconstruction and infrastructure development. The multitude of AED projects vary widely in dollar value and scope with a large percentage being the construction and the operations and management (O&M) of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) complexes to support the spread of governance.

Our first day, we visited a building construction site at the Ministry of Defense in Kabul and looked at electrical upgrades at an Afghan National Army complex. The technical experience and professionalism that AED offers through the oversight and management of projects ensure a safe final product for the ANSF. On the second day of site visits, we toured the Afghan National Military Academy (ANMA) and Kabul International Airport. The military academy, affectionately known as “East Point,” was between classes and at the end of its “Beast” year. We met cadets training for the annual Sandhurst Competition held at West Point and also were treated to chai with the Commandant. AED recently added three newly graduated ANMA cadets as staff, a program which it hopes to continue in order to develop the young Afghan officers. At the airport, we visited the Afghan National Air Corps barracks, offices, and hangars of which AED had overseen the construction and now conducts the O&M. All of these facilities and programs expand the capability of the ANSF which validate AED’s mission.



Existing electrical system at MoD



1LTs Manteufel and Archer with  
ANMA Commandant

We shadowed COL O’Donovan on our third day, learning a lot about the workings of AED. We met with a construction firm who has over \$100 million in contracts; and we sat in on two video teleconferences: one with congressional staffers and one with the Battalion / Brigade Pre Command Course students at Fort Leonard Wood. This day of shadowing brought to light the immense responsibility in construction that AED carries in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. For 2009, AED will have over \$4 billion in construction projects throughout Afghanistan with only a staff of a little over 300 personnel. The relationships that AED has with not only its contractors, but various diplomatic and military organizations, are at the heart of rebuilding the infrastructure and ANSF that will lead to a more stable and improved country.

The lessons that we gained from the trip were many and varied. A lesson that we, ourselves, can apply in project management is that oversight is an absolute necessity. AED has found a direct correlation between contractor’s timeliness of project completion and quality of work to the amount of time AED quality assurance (QA) inspectors spend on-site. While our troop construction projects normally are under the supervision of a platoon leader and platoon sergeant, many of our battalion’s Commander’s Emergency Response Program projects do not receive the same level of QA attention due to personnel and location limitations. Since QA checks are a key part to making sure that projects are done well, efforts should be made to train Afghan engineers to undertake this responsibility.

Another piece of information we gained was the importance that long lead items have a huge impact on projects at all levels. Long lead items are items that must be ordered or fabricated for a specific project, e.g. generators. AED project managers teach their contractors on backwards planning in order to finish projects on time. At the platoon and company level, we must identify our need for materials and diligently track material flow in order to ensure the timely completion of our own projects.

We also had the opportunity to learn about future plans for water management in country. In the past, proper studies were not conducted prior to the construction of dams which resulted in massive decrease in usable farmland. Having learned from the US government's failures in the 1950s with the Helmand Valley Authority to irrigate land, AED currently is working to conduct proper and detailed studies prior to the emplacement of locks, dams, and new irrigation systems. There is a massive amount of water work that Afghanistan needs but only once the proper data is collected. Hastiness in planning has the potential to yield unwanted ramifications during execution.

Given just three days, the AED OPD program succeeds at exposing our junior officers to a different yet critical mission and of efforts and programs of which we never would have known. We learned about the contracting process, the importance of project management both by the contractor and by QA officers, and the impact that AED has on the people of Afghanistan. The exposure to AED has been a unique experience in which lieutenants and junior captains have been able to visit multiple project sites and understand the role of AED and the non-troop leading opportunities available to engineer officers to contribute to the counter-insurgency fight. As BG Gregg Martin, the Engineer School Commandant, broadcasts: a few of the greatest aspects of the Engineer Regiment is that it offers options and transferrable skills beyond any other branch. Engineers can be anything in between combat warriors to nation builders. The AED OPD program has embraced TF Hammer officers to show us what great Engineers can do.